The Builder.

No. CCII.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1846.

MR. HAY'S reputation as a writer on decoration, and certain preliminary flourishes as to his doings at the Society of Arts in the Adelphi, led us, perhaps, to enter the hall there with too great expectations. Certain it is we were much disappointed. If the society, after a certain vacation, and the employment of an ordinary decorator, had opened the room at the commencement of their session without comment, we should probably have thought it very satisfactorily fitted up, and agreeably painted. But as an example of superior art,—a specimen of the best we can do,—we are unable to pronnunce it successful.

Intrusted with the embellishment of the hall of a society which has for its object the advancement of the ornamental and useful arts, Mr. Hay says, he naturally felt much anxiety as to the result of his labours; and this anxiety was increased by the reflection, that his work must necessarily be of a nature calculated to accompany one of the greatest efforts in high art of which this country can boast. His first object, therefore, was to adopt such a style of decoration as should not only embellish the hall, but at the same time give additional effect to those great works of art which it contains, connecting the whole in one general harmony of form and colour.

Accordingly, to bring out the true and natural effect of the pictures, he has surrounded them with cloth of a deep purple hue; in the belief, that the nature of its surface is rather to absorb than reflect the rays of light that fall upon it, and consequently to give greater effect to the pigments employed by the artist.

The wall is terminated by a slightly enriched cornice, surmounted by a plain cove 8 feet 4 inches wide; and with this the decorator's work begins. The cove is followed by a narrow border of stucco work, then a flat space also quite plain, then the aperture for the cupola-light. The sides of the aperture are formed into panels by a narrow moulding.

The cornice he has sought to unite with the walls, by painting it of a *terra cotta* hue. On the plain surface of the cove which surmounts the cornice, the decorator has confined himself to what he calls "a simple combination of geometric with chromatic harmony," representing mosaic work of *giallo antico*, *rosso antico*, *lapis lazuli*, and inlaid gold.

"The band of stucco work which divides this cove from the flat part of the ceiling is painted pure white, to represent the statuary marble, as are also the mouldings round and upon the aperture that leads to the cupola light. This was adopted in preference to the *terra cotta* colour of the cornice, as being equally appropriate and more light in effect." (We should think so, too.) "The flat part of the ceiling is also enriched by a mosaic work of a similar chromatic harmony of the same marbles, but of a different harmony of form from that of the cove, and without gold. The panels in the space leading to the cupola, are similarly enriched by a mosaic work, composed of *lapis lazuli* and *siena* combined with inlaid gold."

The figures forming the design in the cove, still following Mr. Hay's own explanation, are produced by the combination of elliptic bands round central points; and the reason for adopting this curve in the space nearest the pictures was, that the curves which form the outline of the human figure, are more allied to the ellipse than any other regular curvilinear figure. In contrast to this arrangement, the flat part of the ceiling which divides the cove from the cupola, is filled with a rectilinear design, formed by a combination of equilateral triangles, producing hexagonal and rhomboid figures, in which are introduced the rose, thistle, and shamrock.

The panels in the sides of the opening for light, are filled with a pattern formed by the combination of a triangle and circle, and in the centre of each panel is an emblazoned shield.*

Now this description, which we have endeavoured to make correct, probably sounds very well; but the fact is, the intention is marred in the execution. Instead of "a *combination* of geometric with chromatic harmony," there is neither one nor the other. As regards the first, or geometric harmony, the "elliptic bands round central points" being developed *on a coved surface*, are distorted, and at each angle of the ceiling, where the sides of the cove meet, and are separated by an upright band, the pattern is so mutilated, so imperfect, as to produce a disagreeable effect on the careful examiner, who would seek in such positions evidence of the art of the designer. Then as to the chromatic harmony, it is too much like monotony (in the daylight at least, we have not yet seen it at night), and the tone is "foxy." In the upper part of the ceiling, where blue predominates, the chromatic effect is more agreeable. The rectilinear pattern in the flat surface above the cove, however, is mutilated at its junction with the band, which surrounds the opening for light, or has a mutilated effect, which is the same thing in decoration. We must confess our surprise, that one who appears to understand so well what ought to be done, has not been more successful in the present case. The cost of the ceiling alone, it is said, would have been, under ordinary circumstances, 500*l*.†

Barry's noble pictures have been freed from the dirt which obscured them, and are seen to great advantage. Two of them (the Orpheus especially) shew considerable injuries, which have been attributed to the mode adopted in cleansing them. Those who conducted the operation, however, state that the damage was done ten or twelve years ago by injudicious varnishing, rendered necessary by the partial failure of the vehicle with which Barry at first painted.

It is to be hoped that they will be examined by competent persons, and all proper steps be taken to ensure their preservation. We have few such to show in England.

In the entrance-hall and passage to stairs, a mosaic pavement has been laid by Mr. Blashfield. It consists of thousands of small tesseræ on a concrete bottom, and is admirably done; in fact, perhaps it is the best specimen we have yet seen. The centre of the main hall is the copy of a pavement in Rome, of which drawings were recently sent over by Mr. Wyatt. The pattern adopted in the passage is too much like that of ordinary floorcloth.

We are glad to find this ancient and useful society reviving: the decorations of which we have spoken, notwithstanding what we felt compelled to say of them in a critical point of view, will tend materially to advance its progress, and they entitle the individuals to whose liberality the society is indebted for them, to great praise. Should it appear hereafter, that Mr. Hay is himself the most important contributor, as is not unlikely, we may be inclined to regret the free expression of our opinion.

* The Royal arms, the arms of Prince Albert, the badge of the Society, and the arms of Barry, the painter! When we are boxed and ticketed, says Landor, we are prized and shewn.

† At the opening meeting, on Wednesday night last, a paper by Mr. Hay, on the first principles of symmetrical beauty, and on the principles employed in the decoration of the hall in question, was read. We shall refer to it.

THE ART-UNION OF LONDON.

CHARTER OF INCORPORATION.

THE charter for the Art-Union of London, the first granted under the new Act of Parliament, having been drawn up with much care, to serve as a precedent in other cases, we are induced to give it in full.

VICTORIA, by the grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Faith, to all to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting: Whereas Our right dearly-beloved Uncle, Adolphus Frederick, Duke of Cambridge, hath, by his Petition, humbly represented unto Us, that he and divers others of our loving subjects have associated together, and have formed a society under the name of "The Art-Union of London," for the general advancement of the fine arts, and for promoting and facilitating a greater knowledge and love of the arts of design on the part of the public generally, and, for the purposes aforesaid, have raised sums of money amounting to one hundred thousand pounds, or thereabouts, by subscription, or contribution, to be allotted and distributed by chance as prizes amongst them, on the condition, nevertheless, that such sums of money so allotted and distributed be expended solely and entirely in the purchase of paintings, drawings, sculpture, or other works of art; and have also purchased paintings and other works of art, to be afterwards allotted and distributed by chance among them; and have entered into, and will have to enter into, important and lasting pecuniary engagements for carrying out the objects of the said society; and that by an Act of Parliament passed in this tenth year of our reign, intituled, "An Act for legalizing Art-Unions," reciting to the effect that certain voluntary associations had been and might thereafter be formed in various parts of the United Kingdom, under the name of Art-Unions, for the purposes in the said Act mentioned (being similar to the purposes of the said association as entered into by the said petitioner and the said other parties), and that the allotment and distribution of paintings, drawings, or other works of art, or of sums of money for their purchase, and the proceedings taken to carry the same into effect, might be deemed and taken to come within the provisions of the several Acts of Parliament passed for the prevention of lotteries, littlegoes, and unlawful games, whereby the members, subscribers, or contributors of such associations as aforesaid, or persons acting under their authority, or on their behalf, might be liable or subjected to certain pains and penalties imposed by law on persons concerned in lotteries, littlegoes, and unlawful games, and reciting that it was expedient that all members of and subscribers and contributors to such voluntary associations as aforesaid, and all persons acting under their authority, or on their behalf, so long only as their proceedings are carried on in good faith for the encouragement of the fine arts, should be discharged from any pains and penalties to which they might have rendered themselves liable, or might thereafter render themselves liable, by reason of any such their proceedings: after enacting as therein is enacted, it is enacted, that all such voluntary associations as aforesaid then constituted, or which might thereafter be constituted according to the provisions thereinafter mentioned, should be deemed to be lawful associations, and the members of and subscribers and contributors to all such lawful associations, and all persons acting under their authority, or on their behalf, for the purposes aforesaid, should be freed and discharged from all pains and penalties, suits, prosecutions, and liabilities, to which by law they would be liable but for the passing of that Act as therein mentioned: provided always, that a royal charter or charters should have been first obtained for the incorporation of any such association, or provided other acts were done as in the said Act mentioned; and hath represented unto Us that the establishment and maintenance of such their association would greatly tend to the extension and improvement of the fine arts in this kingdom, and that they have been advised that the object of their undertaking would be more effectually obtained were the same to receive our royal sanction and confirmation, and he hath besought us to grant to them and to those who shall hereafter become members of the same society our royal charter of incorporation for the purposes aforesaid: now know ye, that we, being desirous of encouraging and promoting a design so laudable and beneficial, of our especial grace, certain knowledge, and mere motion, have willed, granted, and declared, and do by these presents, for us, our heirs and successors, will, grant, and declare, that the said Adolphus Frederick, Duke of Cambridge, and such others of our loving subjects as have formed themselves into and

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